



Exercise 3.3

Creating a Statement



Resource professionals need to be able to articulate the consequences of land-use decisions to natural resources. Policy decision makers may request advice from resource professionals when trying to effectively guide development, conserve natural resources, and develop and implement policies that regulate resource use. Resource professionals may be asked to make a written or oral statement based on their expertise. Creating an organized, clear, and concise statement about natural resource conditions and how specific land-use changes may affect them is an important skill for resource professionals working in the interface. Developing a statement that is based on the best available science rather than personal values or emotions is essential. Well-crafted statements can help stakeholders better understand the issues and help decision makers make informed choices. In this exercise, participants will practice developing a statement that provides pertinent information without presenting personal biases.

Objectives: Participants will be able to:

1. Organize their expertise into a helpful statement.
2. Provide science-based information rather than personal values or opinions.

Materials:

Presentations 3.1, 3.4, and 3.5

Handout 1: Guana River State Park and the Ponte Vedra High School Controversy

Flip chart and markers (optional)

Time: 45 minutes

1. Distribute *Handout 1: Guana River State Park and the Ponte Vedra High School Controversy* to the group and ask them to divide into small groups of 3 to 5 people.
2. Present the corresponding slides for this exercise from *Presentations 3.1, 3.4, and 3.5* to provide background information about the region and the conflict.
3. Ask each group to develop a brief statement (a paragraph or a bulleted list) that could be used to help decision makers understand the natural resource implications of their decisions. This statement should include science-based information about the potential natural resource implications of developing the Guana River State Park site for the high school.
4. When developing this statement, remind your participants that policy makers evaluate issues on a variety of dimensions besides natural resources: physical and biological feasibility, economic efficiency, equity, social or cultural acceptability, and operational or administrative

practicality. The statements written by participants should primarily cover natural resource considerations but may acknowledge the importance of these other factors.

5. Ask each small group to present its statement to the other groups.

6. After all the groups have finished, ask your participants:

- Which statements did the best job of presenting a professional opinion? How was that accomplished?
- Which statements, if any, made appeals to emotional views and personal opinions? How? How could it be improved?
- Which statements made the listener feel more knowledgeable about the subject? How was this accomplished?
- Invite the group to discuss what they learned.

Optional: If you have limited time or want your participants to practice making a point with a visual aid, give them (or let them sketch) a graph or picture and ask them to present a brief statement to the group using only the visual aid.

Optional: Natural resource professionals must frequently get their point across in one page or less, as is often the case when working with policy makers. Ask your participants to condense their messages into a short summary. This is an excellent way to practice scrutinizing the information and making sure every sentence is as clear and concise as possible.

Summary

Natural resource professionals may be asked to provide verbal or written statements about the natural resource issues and their potential consequences. It is important for them to be able to create a clear and concise statement based on their professional (not personal) opinions.

Handout 1: Guana River State Park and the Ponte Vedra High School Controversy

Introduction

A barrier island off Florida's northeast coast is home to some of the most unique natural and cultural resources in the region. The Guana River Tract includes the 2,400-acre Guana River State Park, managed by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and a 9,800-acre wildlife management area, managed by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. The land was purchased in 1984 by the state with funding from conservation groups. The island, which is about half-way between Jacksonville and St. Augustine, is also home to the Guana Tolomato Matanzas National Estuarine Research Reserve, a 60,000-acre protected area comprised of mangrove tidal wetlands, salt marshes, and estuarine lagoons. The reserve contains the northernmost mangrove habitat on the eastern coast of the United States. It serves as a calving ground for the endangered right whale and also provides habitat for manatees, wood storks, bald eagles, and peregrine falcons.

Guana River State Park provides recreational, economic, ecological, and cultural resources to the local community and visitors. The park contains two public-access beaches and offers fishing, birding, and educational programs. A portion of Guana River was dammed in 1957, creating Guana Lake. The lake is brackish near its southern boundary at Guana Dam and gradually becomes a freshwater reservoir as one travels away from the dam. Both saltwater and freshwater fish and shellfish species of commercial and recreational value can be found in the lake. Three species of sea turtles nest on the park's 4.2-mile stretch of undeveloped beach, and a variety of shorebirds and migratory songbirds, as well as indigo snakes, gopher tortoises, and alligators live in the park. There are seventeen known historic or prehistoric cultural sites in the park. The Shell Bluff Landing site contains an early-nineteenth-century Minorcan coquina block well and has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Wright's Landing site is believed to be the location of a seventeenth-century Spanish mission, the Nativity of Our Lady of Tolomato, and contains a prehistoric earthen burial mound. In 2004, the fate of Guana River State Park became a major topic of debate in the community.

The Issue

Ponte Vedra, a wealthy coastal community immediately north of Guana River State Park, was growing rapidly. With limited new land to develop, the population expansion was putting development pressures on Guana River State Park. A Publix shopping center was built at the northern border of the park's wildlife management area. Local officials approved the development of a new community in the area for approximately 30,000 residents. Local residents became concerned about traffic and crowded schools. About 1,300 students in the Ponte Vedra area were traveling 24 miles round-trip to attend high school. Local citizens proposed the development of a high school to meet the increased demand from the new community and to reduce students' traveling time. Three potential sites were identified, one of which was inside the Guana River State Park. Many people favored this site, claiming it offered more land at a lower cost, greater access, fewer traffic problems, and more opportunity to create a buffer between the school and area residential developments. Approximately 100 acres of the wildlife management area within the park would be needed for the school. (According to state-developed formulas, a 1,500-student high school would require a minimum of 100 acres to accommodate all the necessary facilities.)

The St. John's County Commission will recommend which site would be most appropriate. The final decision will be made by the Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund, comprised of the governor and his cabinet members.

Stakeholders in favor of the Guana River State Park location:

Ponte Vedra High School Coalition
St. Johns County School Board
County residents

Stakeholders opposed to the Guana River State Park location:

Friends of Guana River State Park
Division of State Lands, Department of Environmental Protection
Florida Governor
County residents

Some pros and cons of using the Guana River State Park as the site for the new high school:

Pros

- Offers more available land than the other sites
- Offers more convenient access than the other sites
- Could be donated by the state to the county (and therefore costs less than the other sites)
- Some people dispute the accuracy of the pristine classification, for example, the area is just “planted pine forest behind the new Publix store”
- Could be a magnet school for environmental studies
- One local business owner offered to swap 100 acres in the area in exchange for the Guana River State Park lands

Cons

- If state-designated conservation lands are reversed for development, a precedent would be set for all state-designated conservation lands to be considered for development
- The area is designated as pristine
- The high school will create negative environmental effects with roads, runoff, traffic, and related development such as gas stations and fast food restaurants
- Guana River is a part of the Guana Tolomato Matanzas National Estuarine Research Reserve System that creates research opportunities to better understand and improve estuarine water systems
- A decision to build in the park will result in five to ten years of litigation and an uncertain outcome

Sources

Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Guana-Tolomato-Matanzas National Estuarine Research Reserve, <http://www.dep.state.fl.us/coastal/sites/gtm/> (accessed September 27, 2005).

Ponte Vedra High School Coalition, Inc, <http://pvhsc.com> (accessed September 27, 2005).